Amendments to the Claims:

Please replace all prior claims versions and listings with the following:

Listing of Claims:

1. **(withdrawn)** A method of making a strong alumina cement comprising:
   a. providing a batch of components comprising a transition alumina, water, a cellulose ether binder, and a pH-modifying component;
   b. mixing the batch components to form a form a substantially plasticized mass; and,
   c. heating the plasticized mass under moisture-retaining conditions at a temperature and for a time at least sufficient to obtain hydroxylation of the transition alumina.

2. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein the transition alumina is selected from the group consisting of γ-,η-, δ-, χ-, θ-, ρ-, and κ-aluminas.

3. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 2 wherein the transition alumina is γ (gamma)-alumina.

4. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein the cellulose ether binder is selected from the group consisting of methylcellulose, hydroxypropyl methylcellulose, hydroxyethylcellulose, hydroxypropylcellulose, methylhydroxyethyl and methylhydroxypropyl cellulose ethers.

5. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein the pH-modifying component is an acid.

6. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 5 wherein the acid is selected from the group consisting of acetic acid, formic acid, nitric acid and hydrochloric acid.

7. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 6 wherein the acid is acetic acid.

8. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein the pH-modifying component is a base.

9. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 8 wherein the base is NH_4OH.

10. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein mixing the batch components includes:
    a. dry blending the transition alumina and cellulosic temporary binder;
    b. combining the water and pH-modifying components to form a liquid mixture; and,

c. mixing the dry blend with the liquid mixture in a mix-muller to obtain a substantially plasticized mass.

11. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 wherein the heating step is carried out at a temperature in the range of 50-100°C for a time in the range of 1-300 hours.

12. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 1 further comprising shaping the substantially plasticized mass into a green preform following the heating step.

13. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 12 wherein the step of forming the green preform is carried out by extrusion.

14. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 13 wherein the green preform is a honeycomb.

15. **(withdrawn)** The method of claim 12 wherein the green preform is a pellet-type structure selected from the group consisting of pellets, beads, and the like.

16. **(original)** A method for making a ceramic honeycomb comprising the steps of:
    a. providing a batch of components comprising a transition alumina, water, a cellulose ether binder, and an acid;
    b. mixing the batch components to form a substantially plasticized mass;
    c. heat-treating the substantially plasticized mass under moisture-retaining conditions at a temperature and for a time at least sufficient to obtain hydroxylation of the transition alumina;
    d. extruding the heat-treated mass into a green honeycomb preform; and,
    e. drying and calcining the green honeycomb preform.

17. **(original)** The method of claim 16 wherein the transition alumina is selected from the group consisting of γ-,η-, δ-, χ-, θ-, ρ-, and κ-aluminas.

18. **(original)** The method of claim 17 wherein the cellulose ether binder is selected from the group consisting of methylcellulose, hydroxypropyl methylcellulose, hydroxyethylcellulose, hydroxypropylcellulose, methylhydroxyethyl and methylhydroxypropyl cellulose ethers.

19. **(original)** The method of claim 19 wherein the acid is selected from the group consisting of acetic acid, formic acid, nitric acid and hydrochloric acid.

20. **(original)** The method of claim 19 wherein the acid is acetic acid.

21. **(original)** The method of claim 16 wherein the heating step is carried out at a temperature in the range of 50-100°C for a time in the range of 1-200 hours.